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Kenya Birds

THE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM
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Birds of parks and gardens in Nairobi: Clockwise from top: Baglafecht Weaver female and male, Singing Cisticola, Red-billed Firefinch, Common Bulbul.
Photos by Peter Usher.

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Kenya Birds Volume 11 number 2

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African Goshawk, a raptor of Nairobi gardens and forests. Photographed by Peter Usher on a Wednesday Morning Birdwalk.

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Letter from the Editor

Welcome to this issue of *Kenya Birds*, and once again apologies for its very late appearance.

Nairobi ranks first among capital cities in terms of birds recorded – over 600 species. In this issue, articles and short notes celebrate the joys of birding in the city. The photos of Peter Usher, mainly taken in Nairobi, brighten the outer pages.

Please note that the names of the birds used in this publication are the ones given in the *Checklist of the Birds of Kenya*, Third Edition, EANHS, 1996. Some changes have since been made in the nomenclature, but in order to "speak the same language," we are using the 1996 checklist until a new one is published. Scientific names have been left out, unless there is a special reason to use them.

On the down side, sudden bird deaths have made media headlines. When many birds die, we think of Avian Influenza, or bird flu. This, at present, is a disease of chickens, mainly found in South-East Asia, and sometimes infecting a few people. Now avian flu has spread to other parts of the world (including parts of Africa), becoming a global concern. And because there is a small chance that it could mutate and infect many people, it causes widespread fear.

This year, however, we have learned that many other causes affect bird populations. For example, massive deaths of doves recently reported from southern Kenya may be due to contamination of waterholes or seeds with pesticides. In this issue, articles look at flamingo deaths in Kenya, and the global threat of avian flu. Readers will also find reports on research, conservation and advocacy activities. The Records section, however, has once again been postponed.

It's been two years since our Mystery Bird Photo Contest! Congratulations to our two winners:

Joseph at Kichwa Tembo in the Masai Mara, and John Start, all the way from Australia (but evidently with good memories of East Africa)

For those of you who remember the competition, the birds were:

1. Augur Buzzard, *Buteo augur*
2. Ruff, *Philomachus pugnax*
3. Eurasian Thick-knee or Stone Curlew, *Burhinus oedicnemus*

With thanks to Itai Shanni for the photos, and many apologies from me for the long delay.

Fleur Ng'weno

Internet Articles on Birds in Swahili

There is a Wikipedia in Kiswahili! Wikipedia is a free encyclopedia on the Internet, to which anyone can contribute. To find English wikipedia, en.wikipedia.org, or Swahili wikipedia, sw.wikipedia.org, go to <http://www.wikipedia.org>

I have already contributed a number of articles on birds to the Swahili wikipedia, but there is a lot of ground to cover and my time is limited. That is why I wanted to ask whether there are Nature Kenya members who might be willing to write articles in Swahili, on birds or indeed any other nature subject.

Any interested people should visit the site to see how it works. They can correct and expand my articles and/or contribute new ones. Anyone who has problems with the special syntax or has a slow connection, could mail articles to my Yahoo mailbox and I would then edit and upload them to the site. I hope you will find this something worthwhile and will try to interest the members.

I have to warn that people have to do this for free. I am sometimes asked whether contributors are paid but the answer is no. It is done for the love of the language and/or culture.

With best wishes,

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Cut-throat Finch Breeding in Mugie, North Laikipia, at 2,000 metres altitude

Here in North Laikipia, 0°42'N and 3°36'E, Cut-throat Finches are breeding at a high elevation of 2000 metres a.s.l..

On 18 September 2005, I noticed a great commotion under an Olive tree with a breeding colony of Speke's Weavers. A juvenile Cut-throat Finch, just feathered enough to flutter after very concerned parents, had dropped from an overhanging Speke's Weaver nest where it had been hatched and reared.

Peter Faull

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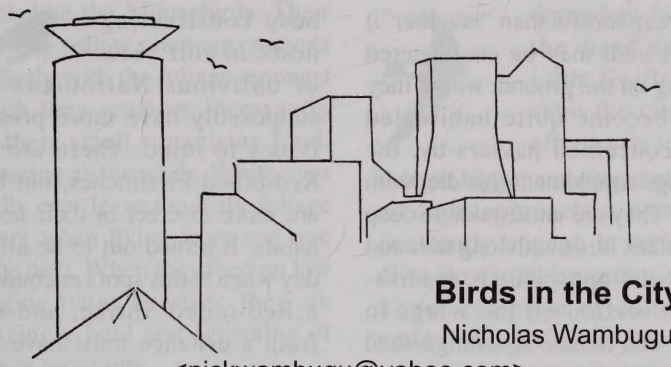
Box 40, Maralal 20600

Who's in Town?



Birds in the City

Nicholas Wambugu
<nickwambugu@yahoo.com>
artwork by Peter Gaede and Nani Croze

Nairobi quite rightly lays claim to being the only major capital city with large mammals roaming wild in its very backyard. As for birders, you need not go out of the city centre at all. At the very heart of the city, an interesting array of garden birds eke out an existence in this most unlikely of places (albeit at reduced densities), flying between imposing skyscrapers, hopping along paths or just twittering amongst the city's trees and shrubs.

Of course an attempt to draw up a conclusive list encounters the common problem of where to draw the boundaries, and what birds really constitute the "City's". I overcame this double hurdle by listing 43 truly resident or regular visitors that one shouldn't be surprised to encounter while in the central business district, CBD. Further, I settled for the part of town bounded by Uhuru Highway, Haile Selassie Avenue, and the Nairobi River along Kirinyaga road. That therefore excludes the impressive entries from Uhuru Park and the National Museums grounds, both literally a lunch break walk from town.

House Sparrows, Black Kites and Pied Crows are too ubiquitous to warrant more than a mention here. For the Laughing Dove and Red-winged Starling, however, the CBD may be as good a place as any other in the wider Nairobi area to encounter them. Both species nest in dark cleavages and clefts of buildings, though the doves may utilise low hanging branches and

twigs. (They would also appear to be erronously named, as their soft coo is more mournful than "laughter".) Whilst both may be encountered feeding on the ground, where they have become quite habituated to unconcerned passers-by, the starlings supplement this diet with fruits. They are unmistakable deep blue-black birds with long tails and reveal the conspicuous reddish-brown section on the wings in flight. The female is distinguished from the male by its grey head and neck regions.

The birding hot-spots within the CBD are undoubtedly the Jeevanjee Gardens and the Aga Khan walk (near the Kenyatta International Conference Centre). A resident pair of Common Fiscals is hard to miss at Jeevanjee Gardens, as is a pair

of Hadada Ibis that frequently build their nest there. Also look out for African Paradise flycatcher and White-bellied Tit. The tit is a small bird that searches twigs and branches for its insect food. Its harsh two to three tcchh tcchh call is unmistakable and revealing.

At the Aga Khan walk, look for one of several Bronze Mannikins who with the onset of the rains are busy constructing nests in full view of oblivious Nairobians who supposedly have more pressing issues to mind. There are also Red-billed Firefinches, but these are more discreet in their nesting habits. It turned out to be a lucky day when at this spot I encountered a Red-tailed Shrike, and what from a distance must have been a Spotted Flycatcher, two birds perhaps in town to book their pending flights northwards.

This too is the ideal spot for the African Pied Wagtail.

That said, a longer list of regulars may be encountered at either of these places or any other leafy spot. Speckled Mousebird, Common Bulbul, Olive Thrush, Baglafecht Weaver and Streaky Seedeater qualify for this category. They depend on the various trees and shrub hedges that adorn many city streets for their food, supplemented with pickings from restaurants floors and leftovers. Not to be missed are Bronze and Variable Sunbirds which sample the ornamental flowers for nectar.

A most delightful set of birds, Montane and Abyssinian White-eyes, are nevertheless easy to

miss. These small birds travel in small parties of four to seven very much like the Mousebirds. Their greenish yellow plumage encrypts perfectly with the foliage amongst which they scamper incessantly for their small organisms food, twittering all the while. White-eyes hardly ever leave the leafy foliage except when flying from one tree to the next. When they feed on low hanging twigs however, they are amazingly bold and accepting of human proximity.

Inevitably, the city centre and especially the two hot spots benefit much from spill over birds from Uhuru Park and the forested suburbs. It is in this light that one may encounter Klaas' Cuckoo, albeit more often heard than seen. Indeed, with birds, one can never rule out the possibility of a surprise turning up.

Not to be mistaken for the hundreds of Feral Pigeons, there also exist Speckled Pigeons, big-sized, spectacular members of their group, observed flying high atop some of the tallest buildings. Strong fliers, these birds probably fly tens if not hundreds of kilometres in their daily quest for food. Red-eyed Doves are also met at quieter, well-wooded spots and grassy lawns.

Another of the building-dependent birds are the hard to miss Little Swifts which skim the city skies effortlessly in flocks that get bigger and extremely noisy as night approaches, when they constantly engage in screeching dives close to their roosting quarters. These comprise of colonies in untidy "villages" under inaccessible overhangs or roof protrusions, which are nevertheless easy to watch.

Less obtrusive but no less present are the African Rock Martins that also attach their nests to buildings, and the African Palm Swifts. The palm swifts, perhaps the most slender of birds, occur as their name aptly suggests where there are palm trees whose dry hanging fronds they rely on for breeding. The city's colony is located in the vicinity of the old bus station whilst another colony occurs at Uhuru Park. Red-rumped Swallows are much rarer, while Barn Swallows are particularly evident during their migratory season here.

Besides the Red-winged Starling, there are Superb and Greater Blue-eared (Glossy) Starlings. The Greater Blue-eared Starling, an all iridescent blue, dove-sized bird, is a widespread bird in the central areas of Kenya, though nowhere

common. It is most likely to be encountered as a visitor in quieter parts of the city or along Uhuru Highway, calling repeatedly – a series of staccato syllables repeated inconsistently. Superb Starlings are unmistakably impressive (and at places very) common bird of places slightly lower and drier than Nairobi, but still abound in open gardens and parklike country within the city. They travel in loose flocks and visit the city mainly from Uhuru Park.

The largest city birds are undoubtedly the Marabou Storks who visit the grounds of Parliament buildings and dumps along the Nairobi River from their breeding grounds over Uhuru Highway. Next is the Black-headed Heron, met along the Nairobi River where several birds linger around the grassy valley. Here too I've met Yellow Wagtails, and the surrounding scrub holds several species of Cisticola.

The Hamerkop perhaps warrants entry into this list, owing to its prevalence on the very outskirts, where several pairs are breeding. Like the Marabou, their numbers might have risen in recent times around the city owing to collapse of the drainage system, thus providing easy pickings of tadpoles.

Finally raptors are represented by Great Sparrowhawks, a number of which make regular forays into the city to prey on the abundant pigeons; Falcons (Peregrine or Lanner), which are constant visitors, perhaps to prey on swifts and small birds; the Little Sparrowhawk, a dove-sized cousin of the Great Sparrowhawk which also preys on birds; and Augur Buzzard which I've seen on a few occasions. Even rarer, and a fitting way to end, is the stately Long-crested Eagle, which I've spotted at the river looking for the many garbage rats along this heavily polluted stretch.

I obviously do not pretend to draw up a conclusive list. Many other birds do make occasional, perhaps even frequent, visits to the city centre, but I've missed them on my regular movements as Nairobi is by no means a small town. A good number do indeed fly overhead but have very little if any interest in town, hence not deserving of mention here. So next time you happen to be in town and have some spare time with you, just look around, you never know who else's in town.

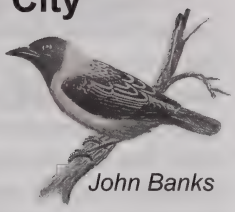
Village Weavers at home in the City

The Black-headed Weaver, *Ploceus cucullatus*, is likely to be known as the Village Weaver in future; that name is already widely used. And indeed this bright yellow bird with a black head and red eye is a home in urban places.

Generally speaking, Black-headed Weavers are more common in the northern and western parts of Nairobi, and less common to the east and south. In the last 30-odd years, they have only been occasional visitors to my garden. In September 2005, however, I began to hear Black-headed Weavers singing in the treetops.

Next door, apartment buildings were going up. The builders had left a tall *Grevillea robusta* tree standing, however, between two blocks of flats. A pair of Black Kites decided that this isolated tree, with digging, bulldozing, hammering and cement-mixing going on all around it, was just the place for a nest. The kites had built a large nest and were incubating.

The Black-headed Weavers also decided that this tree, with an active kite's nest and the digging, bulldozing, hammering and cement-mixing around it, was the right place to start a nesting colony. The males were busily building, singing and displaying in the high branches, all around the kites' nest.



John Banks

Their choice of location must have seemed even more ideal when they discovered our birdbath in October.

The nests were quite high and I could not see them very well. Once the weavers became regular users of the birdbath, however, I was able to observe the birds more closely. One day, I saw a male with a metal ring! I guessed that this bird must once have lived or passed through the National Museums grounds. The Nairobi Ringing Group has a bird-ringing programme there most Thursday mornings, and has ringed dozens of Black-headed Weavers.

The sounds of Black-headed Weavers were a constant through the months of October and November, almost drowning out everything else. In December, however, they became quiet. It was almost a relief. I guessed that the young had hatched and were being fed – or perhaps had already fledged. Possibly nesting failed because of the drought, although Nairobi received a few days of rain. No Black-headed Weavers were seen in mid-December, and only occasional birds in the next two hot and dry months.

By late February 2006, however, just before unseasonal rains ended the drought in Nairobi, Black-headed Weavers were singing again. New nests were being built in the lone *Grevillea* tree, where the Black Kite had fledged and left. On March 9, I saw a male with a ring at the birdbath.

The story of the nesting weavers was brought to an abrupt end a couple of days later, when the *Grevillea* tree was cut down. The weavers stayed around for a few days and then left. Somewhat to my relief, they did not choose any of our trees. They probably went out looking for a busier intersection for their nesting colony.

Fleur Ng'weno

Fruiting fig tree in Spring Valley garden

Over a period of about 2 weeks from 12th January 2006 to the end of the month, a large wild fig tree (*Ficus thonningii*) came into fruit in the garden of my home in Spring Valley, Nairobi. Readers will recall it was very dry at the time; consequently, the tree became alive with birds.

In fact, one afternoon, we had 10 Silvery-cheeked Hornbills gorging themselves on the fruit in the tree. Also, throughout the period the tree was full of large numbers of Speckled Mousebirds, Common Bulbuls and Olive Thrushes.

To be included in my count, the bird had to actually land in the tree. Over the 2 week observation period I saw a total of 35 different species during the day time, and at night the tree was visited by many Fruit-bats.

Not bad for one tree in a Nairobi suburban garden!

The full list of birds recorded: Hadada Ibis, Black Kite, African Green Pigeon, Hartlaub's Turaco, Speckled Mousebird, Silvery-cheeked Hornbill, White-headed Barbet, Spot-flanked Barbet, Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird, Lesser Honeyguide, Grey Woodpecker, Common Bulbul, Slender-billed Greenbul, Olive Thrush, White-eyed Slaty Flycatcher, Blackcap, Willow Warbler, Yellow-breasted Apalis, Montane White-eye, Abyssinian White-eye, White-bellied Tit, Chin-spot Batis, African Paradise Flycatcher, Black-backed Puffback, Black Cuckoo-shrike, Pied Crow, Violet-backed Starling, Collared Sunbird, Variable Sunbird,

Variable Sunbird by John Banks

Amethyst Sunbird, Baglafecht Weaver, Red-billed Firefinch, Bronze Mannikin, Village Indigobird, Streaky Seedeater. Total 35 species.

Philip Hechle
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Thousands of Lesser Flamingos at Lake Naivasha?

by David Harper[1, 2], Muchane Muchai[2], Dominic Kamau[2] and Timothy Mwinami[2]
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In the second half of 2006, there were several newspaper reports of a sudden increase in Lesser Flamingos at Lake Naivasha, and that they were dying in large numbers there and at Lake Nakuru, because of pollution and toxic water. Readers with a cynical disposition might suspect that, yet again, the only news that newspapers like is bad news and if bad news doesn't exist, then reporters can twist the facts around.

The belief that Lesser Flamingos are being poisoned by humans has been around for about 15 years. A mortality of several thousand birds occurred at Nakuru in the early 1990s. The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), who at that time had a conservation project there, speculated in the press and on the Internet that heavy metals were causing the mortality, but proof of this statement was never published. A second mortality occurred in the mid 1990s, and then between 1999 and 2000 a very large mortality occurred at Lake Bogoria. David Harper and staff of the Museums' Ornithology Department were studying that lake during this mortality. There were about a million birds on Bogoria in early 2000, dying at a rate of about 700 a day. All ages died, even birds recently fledged. There are no sources of heavy metal pollution at Bogoria and it is highly unlikely that some birds could pick it up in Nakuru, fly to Bogoria and then die among hundreds of healthy birds.

A flamingo lives for about 40 years or so, roughly 15,000 days. (See *Kenya Birds*, volume 11:1). As a back-of-the-envelope' calculation, that means from a million birds about 70 are dying

each day, naturally. But no animal populations have regular deaths, so perhaps flamingo mortality events are part of this irregular fluctuation of their environment? Is it a coincidence that each mortality event occurred at a lake where the numbers of flamingos were close a million, and during or at the end of a long drought in the country?

From 2002, scientific papers from a group of German and Kenyan scientists led by Lothar Krienitz began to produce new evidence: that levels of toxins, naturally produced by cyanobacteria (commonly called blue-green algae), had been measured in Kenyan soda lakes and hot springs (Krienitz et al, 2003). The toxin levels might be high enough to kill Lesser Flamingos. A few dead flamingos were found in 2002 (although there were no big mortalities at this time) that when analysed, had levels of these toxins high enough to perhaps have killed them. These high levels were not found on a repeat visit in 2004. Inevitably, this "bad" news was picked up by the media and amplified so that every dead flamingo now means poisoned water.

In early 2006, at both Nakuru and Elmenteita, Lesser Flamingo numbers suddenly increased. Elmenteita's went from nearly nothing to 70,000. The increase in numbers of healthy birds was accompanied by deaths – in the case of each lake a tiny fraction, about 2% of the numbers. The mortality lasted for about 2 weeks. A similar increase in numbers occurred in June, and most recently in Lake Oloidien (see below).

Is it likely that a tiny fraction of the birds picked up poison in the lake and others did not? It is much more likely that those birds were weakened by their travels that brought them to the lake, had weakened immune systems, and were susceptible to the diseases which the birds carry but which a healthy bird can resist. Research by Dr Lindsay Oakes of Washington State University, working with the Leicester University and National Museums team, last year identified quite a number of bacterial and fungal diseases that individual birds were dying from – all of them displaying the same symptoms that have been claimed as evidence for heavy metal poisoning and cyanobacterial toxin poisoning. The explanation currently popular is that the mortalities in Nakuru and Oloidien are caused by Salmonella infection.

The story of exactly why flamingos die periodically is complex and almost certainly involves the combination of several factors. We must distinguish between those factors which cause the birds' immune systems to weaken – stressors – and those factors which kill weakened birds.

For the first time ever, in November 2006, David Harper shall lead a research team at Lake Bogoria in partnership with Professor Kenneth Mavuti of the University of Nairobi, and the National Museums of Kenya, to which appropriate staff of Kenya Wildlife Service and Tanzanian equivalent bodies have been invited, which will have **both** a veterinarian (Lindsay Oakes) and a cyanobacterial toxin expert (Dr Tomacz Jurczak from Poland). We shall endeavour to conduct post-mortems on birds that have died and examine all three theories of flamingo mortality – microbial disease, cyanobacterial toxins and heavy metal poisoning. Perhaps after that, the scientific and conservation community will have a better idea of flamingo population dynamics.

To return to Naivasha, where we started this article. This is a fresh water lake which has produced many surprises, but hosting thousands of Lesser Flamingos is unlikely to remain one of them. Naivasha supports a few hundred Greater Flamingos at times, because they can find food there – Greaters are carnivores feeding on insects and crustaceans and Naivasha has an abundance of water boatmen that make good Greater Flamingo dinners. Lesser Flamingos stop by in smaller numbers, because they at least can drink there, but not feed.

The event that led to news stories though, is an abundance of Lesser Flamingos that settled on Lake Oloidien in August 2006. Lake Oloidien, also known as the 'Little Lake', is at the south west corner of

Greater Flamingo

Naivasha. It is a volcanic crater lake, which was once connected to the main lake but has not been directly joined since 1979. (Sadly, many maps are sold to tourists which still show this connection, because they are based on the last-published Survey of Kenya 1:50,000, which marks the lake's high water level.) David Harper and his team have been conducting research in the Lake Naivasha basin since 1982 and have recorded Oloidien steadily becoming more saline-alkaline as it loses more water by evaporation than it receives in seepage.

This slow increase in salinity meant that it became greener and greener, for perfectly natural reasons. Lakes with high pH (alkaline lakes) have their phosphorus chemically more available, so the algae and cyanobacteria which can tolerate the pH, thrive on the phosphorus. Until this year, these were all single celled species, too small for anything but tiny invertebrates to feed on.

In July 2006, Oloidien water passed the magic salinity mark that made it suitable for a much larger species, Spirulina (actually called *Arthrospira fusiformis* nowadays). Hey presto! the few Lesser Flamingos that regularly dropped in by chance stayed, because they could feed. As the numbers grew, more dropped in to join them. Within a few weeks in August, twenty thousand Lesser Flamingos had swelled to 200,000.

This is now not only an exciting spectacle for the lakeside residents, which include many well-known Nature Kenya members, but it's exciting to scientists too. Oloidien water, though far too saline for humans or cattle to drink, is NOT too saline for flamingos to drink. So all over the lake, you have the remarkable spectacle of groups of lesser flamingos feeding, next to groups which are drinking, next to groups which are bathing. In no other lake in the world can this be observed, we believe.

Lesser Flamingo

Map of Lake Naivasha and the "little lake" Oloidien courtesy of the Department of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya

And the deaths? Once again about 2% of the resident population. That **does not** mean the lake is polluted, it **does not** mean the lake is toxic. It just means the marabou storks will not go hungry.

To follow the story of flamingos on the Rift Valley lakes, visit the website http://kenya-rift-lakes.org

Dr David Harper has been leading research teams to the Rift Valley lakes with Prof Ken Mavuti, of the University of Nairobi, for 25 years. Their work has been funded by the Earthwatch Institute and supported by Earthwatch volunteers since 1987. Their scientific research and community involvement in soda lake sustainability is funded by the Darwin Initiative, 2003-08. The research has been carried out in collaboration with the Dept. of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya.

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Rosy-patched Bush-Shrike nesting in Olorgesailie

George W. Eshiamwata <George@birdlife.or.ke>

A Rosy-patched Bush-Shrike is, in my opinion, a pretty, beautiful, lovely, attractive, handsome, neat, gorgeous and elegant bird! If most of these descriptions are synonymous, please pardon me, for I would like say that it merits such descriptions.

In Kenya there are two races of Rosy-patched Bush-Shrike, *Rhodophoneus cruentus*, with *R.c. hilgerti* found mainly north of the equator and *R.c. cathemagmenus* being the race south of the equator, including Olorgesailie Prehistoric Site off the Magadi Road. Both races exhibit sexual dimorphism, with the males in the southern race having a rose-red throat and breast patch bordered by black. The female has a white throat with a black border expanded to form a patch on upper breast. Despite these bright colours, and the rosy red rump conspicuous in flight, this species might go unnoticed, as the rest of its plumage is dull and blends well with the savannah habitat.

The sighting of a pair of Rosy-patched Bush-Shrike in late June 2001 at Olorgesailie Prehistoric Site, where I was doing field work on Banded Parisomas, was the first for some time. Then several pairs were sighted in subsequent months, including some building nests. Just like in the Biblical Noah's Ark, the bush-shrikes came in twos – monogamous and destined for nesting.

Eight pairs were sighted between June and November 2001, randomly distributed within the Olorgesailie area that was my study site. Each pair appeared confined to one area almost throughout the duration of my observations. The species appears to be very territorial, with no overlap observed.

Edwin Selempo

Among the attributes of birds is their ability to take advantage of favourable conditions. The Olorgesailie area and its environs had registered some sporadic rainfall from June, with optimal amounts in November 2001. The changes that rainfall brought, triggering an abundance of food

resources, coincided with the sighting of three pairs of Rosy-patched Bush-Shrike nesting. Soon they were tending to hatchlings. Observations ended at that time, so I have no records of fledging or post-fledging success.

The synchrony in the nesting makes me conclude that theirs was a breeding dispersal. However, it would be important to know where the birds migrated from, and the habitat condition where they came from, to ascertain whether their movement was due to food scarcity or deterioration of the habitat.

For those bird watching in Olorgesailie in future: be on the lookout, especially between June to December, and if you see Rosy-patched Bush-Shrikes, especially breeding pairs, send your records to Nature Kenya or the Museum's Department of Ornithology.

Chestnut Weavers breeding on the Nairobi-Magadi Road

Chege Kariuki <chege@birdwatchingeastafrica.com>

On the 1st of June 2005 a group of Nairobi birders drove down the Magadi Road, still very green with long grass in some flat areas.

Chestnut Weavers were nesting in a big colony in acacia woodland along the road. This was some kilometres beyond the bridge, and before the two water holes. Two weeks earlier, during the Nature Kenya Sunday Birdwalk on the 15th of May, we saw the males starting nest-building. Most of the nests were then at the ring stage.

However, on the 1st of June, 17 days later, we saw females bringing food (caterpillars) to the young ones in the nest. This time only females were doing the feeding.

Then, some few hundred metres down the road, we found another, new colony coming up and the tree was full of males building nests, together with Speke's Weavers, while Chestnut Sparrows were busy wing quivering and trying to take over the nests from the Chestnut Weavers.

In *Birds of Africa*, volume VII, it says that the male Chestnut Weavers go away after nest building, meaning that the incubation, feeding of and caring for the young are fully done by females. This was evident during our two visits (males building the nests and females doing the rest).

However, after discovering the next new colony a few hundred metres or less than a kilometre away, I thought that these could be the same males that are building some more nests for other females?

Another record of Oriole-Finch from the Mau Forest area

James Bradley <j.e.bradley@reading.ac.uk>
drawing by Andrew Kamiti

The Oriole-Finch is a small and shy forest finch that inhabits dense undergrowth and fruiting trees in Kenya's highland forest areas. Roughly the size of a Red-billed Quelea, the male is similar in appearance to a Black-headed Oriole but with a shorter and stubbier, orange bill. The female is a mix of dull olive tones above and paler olive-yellow on the belly. It is unique in representing the only species of its genus in the finch family (Fringillidae).

Recent literature speculates on the status of Oriole-Finch in the forests that flank the rift valley. Previously thought to be absent from the Mau forests (Zimmerman *et al.* 1996) a recent sighting indicates that it does occur in the South-west Mau Forest but is uncommon there (Bennun 2003).

While birding along the Kimugu River below the Kericho Tea Hotel (approximate altitude 2150m) on the morning of 25th December 2004, Phillip Bradley and myself were fortunate enough to observe a female Oriole-Finch and an hour later, a male at a location half a kilometre away from the first sighting. Both birds were observed foraging in the mid-level of large fig trees directly adjacent to the river. This site is approximately 10km from the more contiguous South-west Mau Forest.

The forest in this river valley, like many in the area, though heavily disturbed in places with many of the larger canopy trees having been removed, still maintains many aspects of the montane forest that characterizes upland areas in Kenya. Birds such as Yellow-spotted Barbet, Equatorial Akalat, Banded Prinia and Sharpe's Starling, more typically associated with a more continuous forest cover, were also observed at this site and attest to the reasonable quality of these remnant river valley forests. These river valleys effectively represent fingers of montane forest radiating outwards from the core area of the South-west Mau Forest. Thus while this is undoubtedly an unusual sighting in terms of location, the habitat is obviously suitable. These birds presumably followed the corridor of forest along the Kimugu River downstream from the South-west Mau Forest.

The scarcity of observations of

Oriole-Finch from the South-west Mau and associated remnant forest patches suggests that it is indeed an uncommon species there although probably resident at low densities and merely overlooked.

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Black-and-white Cuckoo (Jacobin Cuckoo) Breeding at Lake Baringo

Jeffory Coburn <Rcoburn10@aol.com>

Since going to Lake Baringo over the past ten years, I have noticed that the Black-and-white or Jacobin Cuckoo is often different from descriptions in the books. Two subspecies occur, *pica* and *serratus*. Both have migratory movements, but only *pica* is known to breed in Kenya. Like other cuckoos, they are brood parasites.

The immature Black-and-white Cuckoo, subspecies *pica*, which I photographed, have no distinct crest. They are black with a hint of brown, with a buff breast right up to the bill. The bill's upper mandible is yellowish-horn, the lower mandible bright yellow, the eyes are black and the legs buff. The tail has a buff feather the full length of the tail on the outside, as well as the tip. The fledgling *pica* have grey under the chin and no wing patch, but are otherwise the same as the immatures.

I also photographed a bird, in September 2005, which was dark grey all over with a black bill, black legs and no white tip of the tail. Also no distinct crest, indicating an immature. It had a buff patch at the base of the primaries. Could this have been an immature *pica*?

Perhaps it is the time of year that I go to Lake Baringo, usually April and October, but until this year I had not seen an adult Black-and-white Cuckoo of subspecies *pica* there. Perhaps they leave after laying their eggs? I have found six nests of Rufous Chatterers with a cuckoo egg in it, and three Rufous Chatterers feeding *pica* out of the nest, and I have come across four groups of four immatures.

In May 2006, however, when I was at Lake Baringo, I actually saw an adult pair of birds prospecting a Rufous Chatterer's nest. I also came across another Rufous Chatterer's nest with three cuckoos in it! The young in the nest were all at different stages, ranging from newly hatched to nearly fledged. As you can imagine the nest was bulging.

The Challenge of Fieldwork

Simon Musila <surnbirds@yahoo.com>

When I announced that I planned to study the rare and cryptic Chapin's Flycatcher in Kakamega Forest, people would ask, "Have you ever seen this bird?" or say "This is a very difficult species." Cracks of doubt began to form.

Despite these odds, I started a reconnaissance study in Kakamega Forest in 2002. The first day, I walked reluctantly toward Isecheno Forest station with Titus Imboma. About 50m from the forest edge, I could not help but gape at what I saw. An immovable wall of towering vegetation stood majestically before me. A wave of trepidation paralysed me psychologically. But with nobody to appeal to, life had to go on.

Once inside the forest, I was enveloped in partial darkness, and I was being rained on! When I focused my binoculars on a particular spot, both my lenses were flooded with water, as drops from the foliage rained on them. As I cleaned them, I sensed that there was movement everywhere, of uncountable leaves and branches. Where was I supposed to look for these birds? If I was to succeed in this project a strategy had to be devised. I started by concentrating on the bare branches and foliage where the authors of *Birds of Kenya and Northern Tanzania* had said they would be found, quiet and perched upright. But there was no sign of bird life.

However, the forest so seemingly devoid of birds was also a cacophony of endless bird calls and songs. The call of the Chapin's Flycatcher, if luckily among them, is a short trill song, that can only be heard if every noise in the forest obeyed your order to"Keep quiet!" There is also an acute shortage of glaring plumage features in these birds, being dingy greyish below, darker on breast, with a short pale grey supraloral stripe; bill mostly black, corners of the mouth yellow, eyes brown, and feet dull blue grey. These are the types of features that can be difficult to detect, with different light reflections and a perching height of 10-20m above the ground.

We did not see any Chapin's Flycatchers on the first two days. I was nearly exploding with stress, ready to drop the project. On the third day I found solace in prayer. It was not in vain. As Titus, Nicholas Shikuyenze and I walked slowly along a trail near Isecheno Forest station, we carefully searched for signs of birds, tracking every movement: shaking leaves disturbed by heavy drops of water, falling

leaves, a few early morning birds. Inside the canopy of a *Maesopsis* tree, on a bare branch, Nicholas noticed a bird that sat quietly, as an ambush guerrilla waiting to attack. The bird appeared to be facing its creator in meditation about its destiny after death. That looked like our object of desire.

When we identified the bird as Chapin's Flycatcher, after consulting the guidebooks at length, posing a lot of questions to one another, glee filled every part of ourselves.

The Chapin's Flycatcher is a scarce range-restricted bird that is known from Lendu Plateau in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Bwindi (Impenetrable) Forest in Uganda, as well as Kakamega rainforest and North Nandi forests in Western Kenya. In our survey we recorded Chapin's Flycatcher in the Isecheno section of the Forest Reserve; in Ikuywa Forest near Ikuywa River Bridge; at Rondo Retreat Centre; and at Quarry Road Junction; and in Buyangu, along the Isiukhu River and behind Buyangu Hill. With continuous fragmentation and destruction of Kakamega Forest, the bird's already low population size may be declining.

The full research paper is now in the latest copy of the *ABC (African Bird Club) Bulletin* if you want to read more.

Eagle at Kinangop

In January 2006, residents of Njabini in South Kinangop found an eagle which had fallen into a dump pit. The residents were angry. Some suspected it to have bird flu, while others said it was feeding on their chickens. One of the residents informed me and I rushed there.

It was hard for me to make the angry and armed crowd understand that the bird was not as they thought. But I thank my Zimmerman guide book, which made them pay attention to what I was saying. They then became friendly to that bird and to others.

The first step we took was to feed the bird half a kilo of meat and a glass of water, with the now happy residents. We kept the bird in a cool place for it to rest, while I was trying to identify it, but it did not seem to recover.

Then we contacted Mr Kimani Ndung'u, who gave me the contact of the Ornithology Department at the National Museums. I was told to wait for the bird to fly. However, it was in a critical condition. So finally we thank the Graham Dangerfield Wildlife Trust at Naivasha, who came to take the bird and care for it.

We wish the eagle a quick recovery and a safe flight.

Charles Mugo
Friends of Kinangop Plateau

WHAT WE KNOW SO FAR

Avian

The avian flu virus in the news is a kind of avian influenza called H5N1. There are many kinds of avian influenza, or bird flu, viruses. Most of these viruses are not dangerous to people or to birds. The H5N1 variety is the one causing concern.

NO outbreak of this dangerous H5N1 type of avian flu had been reported in Kenya as at the end October 2006.

Avian flu type H5N1 is a disease of domestic poultry, that is, chickens and domestic ducks, geese and turkeys.

Most outbreaks of avian flu H5N1 have been in South East Asia.

In some cases in Asia and Europe it has been found in wild birds, who died of the disease. And in a very few cases, people have caught the disease from handling infected poultry.

In 2006, avian flu reached a number of African countries: Nigeria, Niger, Ivory Coast, Cameroon and Burkina Faso in the west; and Djibouti, Egypt and Sudan in the east. All cases were in chickens or other poultry. In Egypt, there have been a few human cases.

Only a few people have become ill with this avian flu; they all handled domestic poultry.

Avian flu type H5N1 has spread to different countries in different ways. In Africa, it seems to have spread through imports of chickens or other poultry.

The virus can also spread through the trade in poultry, pet birds, or the illegal wild bird trade. Scientists are studying whether the use of chicken manure as food in fish farms or pig farms can spread the virus.

Wild birds also seem to play a role, although it is not clear. Many countries where wild birds migrate have not recorded any avian flu.

Cockerel by Johnson Rwige

Flu

WHAT WE CAN DO

We can continue to watch, listen to and enjoy birds. It is safe to view waterbirds. There is no confirmation that any person has caught the virus from a wild bird.

We can continue to eat chicken, turkey, duck and eggs. Boiling, roasting or frying kills the virus. Do not eat sick or dying chickens or waterbirds.

By observing birds, bird watchers can also help the authorities. Kenya and many other countries are carrying out surveillance programmes for wild birds. These include monitoring wetlands and other sites for sick or dead birds, and taking samples of secretions from live, apparently healthy birds. Sampling should only be carried out by those with proper training and protective clothing.

Birdwatchers, however, can report unusual birds deaths. There are many causes for sudden deaths of birds: drought, pollution, viral and bacterial diseases. Recent die-offs of flamingos and doves in Kenya have tested negative for avian flu. Unusual deaths of birds are still worth reporting, however. A useful guideline is, report if you find more than five dead birds at one place. Give the location and estimate the number of dead birds.

Avian influenza hotlines in Kenya (020) 631639, 0722-726682, (020) 2718292, or 0722- 331548.

Do not pick up sick or dead ducks or other waterbirds. The virus is spread by close contact with infected birds or their faeces. Other, more common inflections are also spread in this way.

Small land birds are not likely to catch avian flu, and even less likely to spread it. Observe normal, sensible hygiene precautions if you have a bird bath or bird feeder: wash hands after handling equipment that has been splashed with bird faeces; rinse out bird baths each day; clean bird feeders and bird baths outside, wash your hands when you finish.

Keep domestic chickens, ducks, geese and turkeys separate from where people eat and sleep.

Do not try to kill wild birds or destroy their natural habitats. A healthy population of wild birds helps to keep diseases away from domestic poultry and people.

More information is available from the BirdLife International website: <www.birdlife.org> and the UN Convention on Migratory Species, <www.cms.int/avianflu/>

Migration at Ngulia, 2004

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David Pearson
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artwork by Nani Croze

Ngulia Safari Lodge (Tsavo West) was discovered to be a unique site for Palaearctic bird migration in 1969. Large numbers of southward-bound night-migrating birds are attracted to the game-viewing lights under misty conditions in November, December and January. The Ngulia Ringing Group has operated there ever since. The birds are caught in fine-mesh nets, gently removed, measured and weighed, fitted with a light aluminium ring on one leg, and released to continue their migration.

Ringing controls, 2004 & 2005

(Birds ringed at one site and caught and released at another site)

Sprosser
24.11.03 Ngulia
22.05.04, Jurmo, Finland
26.11.03 Ngulia
23.05.04, Kaliningrad, Russia

Marsh Warbler
27.07.02 Uebersyren, Luxembourg
12.11.04, Ngulia
18.07.03 Weissenberg, Germany
11.11.04, Ngulia
15.06.04 ZemĬchy, Czech Republic
24.11.04, Ngulia
24.07.04 Bambrugge, Belgium
12.11.04, Ngulia

Olive-tree Warbler
28.11.03 Ngulia
13.01.05, Francistown, Botswana

2004 Season

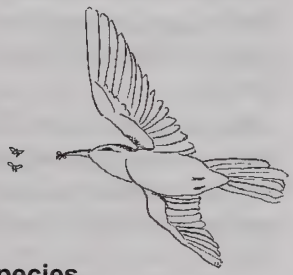
Two major sessions were organized around the time of the new moon, from 7 to 24 November and 2 to 17 December. A total of 41 people from ten countries took part. November provided an unusual opportunity to see the early phase of the Ngulia passage, with useful catches of early-season species which we usually see only in small numbers. It produced more than 11,000 birds in 'dry' mist, often patchy and coming in late at night. In December, mist with rain lived up to expectations, producing large catches, and the combined ringing total for the season, 25,455, was second only to the massive total of 1995.

Migrants caught at night accounted for 28% of all birds ringed (cf. 38% in 2003 and 18% in 2002). The Nightingale was undoubtedly 'bird of the year' with a total of 304 ringed compared to the previous annual record of 138 in 1998. There were four controls of foreign-ringed birds, all Marsh Warblers, all in November.

November session

In November, little of the bush was in leaf. During the nights of 11–13, with light mist, almost 5000 birds were ringed. For the next two nights, low cloud was reluctant to descend as mist, but with tapes of bird song playing from 02:00 hrs to enhance attraction, over 1500 more migrants were caught.

Then with better mist and tapes no longer required, a further 2400 were caught on 16-17. Almost half the 9000+ birds ringed during this first week were Sprossers, while Whitethroats were roughly equal in numbers with Marsh Warblers. Two Eurasian Bee-eaters were the first for Ngulia.



Early species

Included in the November catch were relatively large numbers of Rufous Bush Chat (85), Olive-tree Warbler (103), Barred Warbler (101), Red-backed Shrike (281) and Spotted Flycatcher (256), and an unprecedented number of Nightingales (272), including 62 on 13th and 64 on 17th. There were only 68 Iranias in this early catch, nine Basra Reed Warblers and just eight River Warblers; our assessment is that these are later migrants at Ngulia. Two unmoulted Great Reed Warblers were very unusual: this species normally occurs later at Ngulia and almost always in fresh plumage.

'Dry' mist season

Five clear nights gave only 156 ringed. But on 23rd mist hovered at tree height late at night, with a few drops of rain. With tapes in use, 347 birds were caught at night followed by a further 908 in the day. The total included a remarkable 908 [*sic*] Marsh Warblers, 18 more Olive-trees, 12 Rivers and two more Eurasian Bee-eaters in the late morning. The final morning followed a similar pattern: of 539 birds ringed, 465 were Marsh.

December start

Thick mist came in at suppertime on 2nd, followed by a heavy shower at 22:30, and many birds arrived at the lights. A large moon rose at 23:00 and the mist was light and patchy, so tapes were played to try to hold birds till morning. This seemed to work well and 599 migrants were caught in the single bush 'L' (110-m of net). Next day, an evening shower was followed by thick mist. Using more bush nets, and some night netting, an overall catch of 737 was taken, with Marsh Warblers (409) again hugely dominant, and ten Olive-tree Warblers, unusual for December.

Main onslaught

More participants began to arrive, and the team soon numbered between 12 and 24. We experienced heavy showers on most nights, but mist tended to be patchy and late, so that tapes were often used to enhance catching. Moderate catches were made daily 5th to 9th, with Sprossers ranking second to Marsh Warbler, River Warblers picking up steadily, a few Basra Reed Warblers each day and one Icterine Warbler.

High numbers

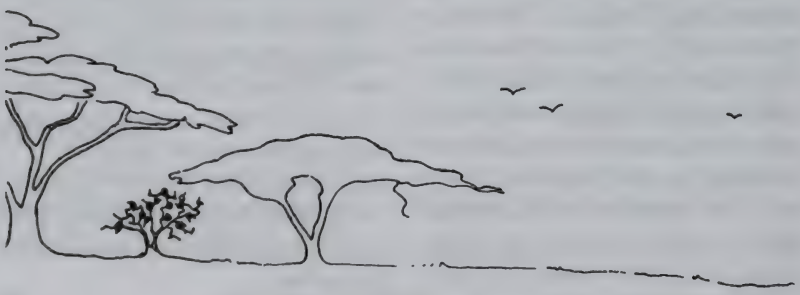
December 10th and 11th proved to be the busiest of 2004. With persistent mist from before midnight until dawn, and very active night and bush operations, over 5000 birds were ringed in these two days, including 2000+ Marsh Warblers, 1400+ Sprossers, 260 River Warblers, 161 Iranias, 143 Willow Warblers (many of the eastern race, *yakutensis*), 11 Basra Reed Warblers, two Great Reed, five more late Olive-tree Warb;ers, another Icterine and a few Black-and-white Cuckoos.

More than 14,000 migrants were ringed during December. The high Nightingale numbers had fallen away, and Spotted Flycatchers, Rufous Bush Chats and shrikes were relatively few, as expected.

Diversity

Overall, the record Nightingale catch and the high numbers of Spotted Flycatchers, Olive-tree and Barred Warblers stand out. Willow Warblers were prominent throughout the season, with a day record of 122 on December 11th. It was also a good year for Red-backed Shrikes and Olivaceous Warblers and, amongst the scarcer species, Sedge and Eurasian Reed Warblers.

The 48 Basra Reed Warblers made up a smaller proportion of the total catch than in many earlier years and, once again, the Upcher's



Warbler contribution of just 14 was meagre. Few wheatears were ringed and only ten Eurasian Nightjars. There were not many days with Barn Swallows feeding in numbers, and the total ringed (132) was the lowest since 1997. There were remarkably few Eurasian Rollers seen, either at night or coasting south after dawn, and only one was ringed.

Afrotropicals

For reasons not entirely clear, the number of Afrotropical birds ringed, just 289, was the lowest since 1990. Though the bush was leafless in November, it had greened up by December; but this bush may be less thick than when nets were first used there ten years ago.

Just 11 Harlequin Quails were ringed in all, far fewer than used to be caught—often inside the Lodge—in the early days. But four Common Button-quails was a good number for a species not caught every year; a Lesser Moorhen picked up in the building at night was only the fifth for Ngulia.

Afrotropical nightjar numbers vary enormously from year to year, but this year, with only seven ringed (all Plain), was one of the poorest. Orange-bellied Parrot, Wire-tailed Swallow and Rüppell's Long-tailed Starling were all new to the ringing list; the starling is a very recent arrival at the site, first seen in October 2003. Other birds of interest ringed included a Barn Owl (second at the Lodge), two Pale Prinias (the third and fourth), Grey-headed, Pygmy and Malachite Kingfishers, several African Paradise Flycatchers,

a Red-capped Robin-Chat and two Pringle's Puffbacks. The first African Reed Warbler since 1982 was netted on 10 December.

Acknowledgements

We thank the Kenya Wildlife Service for allowing us to ring birds at Ngulia. The acting Lodge manager, Victor Mwambui, and his staff deserve our gratitude for their friendly help. The Wetland Trust, the Nairobi Ringing Group, Nature Kenya and three individual members of the Ngulia RG provided very much appreciated financial support. The Swedish Ringing Centre allowed us, for the fifteenth year, to use their rings and provided their normal efficient support with recoveries.

SHORT NOTE

Why do robin-chats mimic cuckoo songs even before cuckoos have started singing in the rainy season?

A query on Kenyabirdsnet brought this intriguing answer from Dr Terry Oatley <cossypha@mweb.co.za>

Cuckoo calls are popular subjects of robin-chat mimicry, partly because they hear them a lot. And also because they fall into the robin-chat's own frequency range and are easy to repeat. For robin-chats, mimicry plays an important role in courtship and territory advertisement; and this singing, including mimicry, starts early in the breeding season, often before visiting cuckoos have arrived.

A species such as the Red-capped Robin-Chat can boast a repertoire of calls of nearly 40 other species of birds, and Rüppell's Robin-Chat can probably match or better this total. (To my knowledge nobody has yet counted a repertoire of this species – one needs to listen to the same individual over a period of several weeks to get a comprehensive count of the number of calls it can mimic.)

The record robin-chat repertoire included 73 calls and song portions of 36 different species of birds of 18 families. And they don't forget them, so it is no problem for them to start repeating Red-chested Cuckoo calls early each breeding season before the cuckoos themselves start shouting.

This ability of robin-chats to mimic cuckoo calls of course calls for caution when monitoring and ticking off cuckoos (and other species) on the basis of calls only. Listen long enough and one can usually distinguish a genuine cuckoo call from a genuine robin-chat copy, if only because sooner or later the robin-chat will introduce what Myles North, the great field ornithologist of mid-last century, aptly described as a "tiddly-pom' variation, or switch to copying African Crowned Eagle or a flock of Eurasian Bee-eaters.

African ornithology is, as ever, full of challenges.

Reports from Nature Kenya and its partners

World Bird Watch, Nature Day, outings, talks, films, publications and other fun and educational activities are the public face of Nature Kenya. Back in the office, work continues on the study and conservation of nature at the local, national and global level. The series of reports that follow give a peek "behind the scene" at Nature Kenya and associated organizations.

Nature Kenya at the Coast

Nature Kenya has a number of programmes at the famed Arabuko-Sokoke forest in Kilifi and Malindi Districts. The focus is on community development to support conservation of the forest and its biodiversity. Key outputs include:

- Participatory Forest Management
- Monitoring the forest and its birds
- Promotion of eco-tourism
- Water pipes for communities (11.5 kilometres)
- Agriculture for forest conservation - alternative crops and simple processing
- Nature-based enterprises - butterflies, honey, silk moths, aloes, trees for income, poles and wood fuel and others

To sustain these initiatives, and to expand coverage to other nearby Important Bird Areas (Mida Creek & Malindi-Watamu Shore, Sabaki River Mouth and Dakatcha Woodland), Nature Kenya now has a physical presence on the ground.

Please visit the Nature Kenya coastal office at Gedi Ruins National Monument at Gede near Watamu!

Paul Matiku

Site Support Groups Open Resource Centres

As conservation takes root in many areas, communities are starting to take charge of their own conservation destiny. Near several Important Bird Areas (IBAs), Nature Kenya has been working with site support groups – community-based organisations committed to conservation. Together, they advocate for the protection of essential habitats, and initiate alternative livelihood

options which offset pressure on natural resources.

In a collaborative effort with communities and donors, Nature Kenya has helped to put up three Resource Centres. On the Kinangop Plateau grasslands and in Kereita forests, through The Friends of Kinangop Plateau and Kijabe Environmental Volunteers, two Resource Centres have come of age. Support for these centres came from the Community Development Trust Fund and Biodiversity Conservation Programme of the European Community.

On Mt Kenya, near Naro Moru, through the COMPACT–UNDP initiative and the Mt Kenya Biodiversity Conservation Group, a magnificent Eco-resource Centre is soon opening its doors to the community and other visitors.

These centres will be models for conservation at the local level. They will exhibit and explain valuable traditional knowledge – use of medicinal plants and indigenous practices promoting conservation. The information will be displayed through photographs, pictures, models and murals in a way that is relevant to communities and visitors alike. Contact Nature Kenya for more information on opening hours and how to get there.

Jacob Machekele

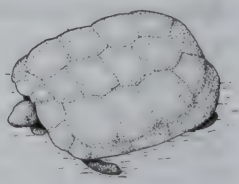
Drawings by Andrew Kamiti

Nature Kenya Committees and Projects

Nature Kenya has several affiliated committees and projects that work to promote and conserve different taxa, species and habitats. These include the Bird Committee, Dudu

Committee, Environmental Legislation and Policy Working

Group (ELPWiG), Kenya Herpeto-fauna Working



Group, Mammal Committee, Plant Committee, Samaki Working Group, Succulenta East Africa and Youth Committee. Projects include Friends of City Park, Friends of Nairobi Arboretum and Nairobi Seasonal Wetlands Biodiversity Park.

The Committee and Projects comprise of people who have common interests and a strong passion for conservation. The groups' activities include talks and lectures, weekly and monthly birdwalks, plant walks, insect walks, succulent identification, field excursions, education programmes, research, fish sampling and identification, advocacy and publishing.

Agatha Nthenge

Site Action Plans for Important Bird Areas

By Joel K Siele
artwork by Nani Croze

Introduction

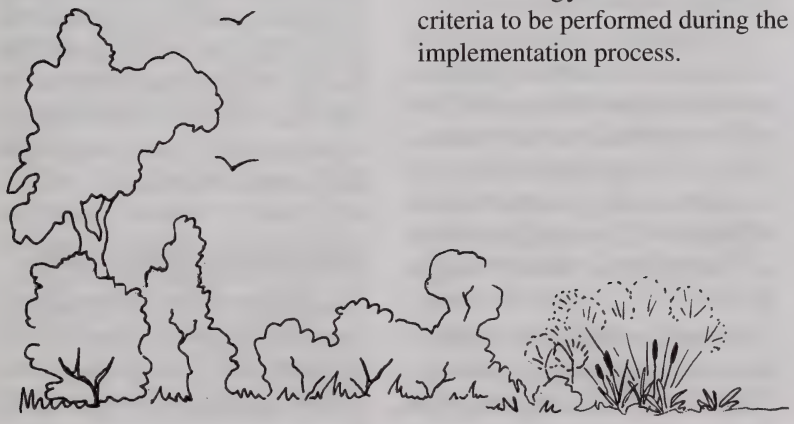
Important Bird Areas (IBAs) are one focus for conservation action. The sites are home to birds that are endangered on a global scale; birds restricted to a very small range, or to a particular biome or ecosystem; or very large congregations of birds. By conserving birds, these areas also conserve other forms of biodiversity.

Sixty Important Bird Areas have been identified in Kenya so far. IBAs include many protected areas such as national parks and forest reserves. More than one third of Kenya's IBAs, however, have no formal protection status.

Site Action Plans

Two draft Site Action Plans (SAP) have been developed, one for Dunga Swamp and one for Mukurwe-ini River Valleys, both unprotected sites. Nature Kenya, in collaboration with the Ornithology Department of the National Museums of Kenya, organised Site Action Plan workshops in August 2005 to come up with strategies to conserve the birds and their habitats. The workshops were organised under the Important Bird Areas monitoring programme and involved various stakeholders from the sites. This process was funded by the Darwin Initiative, through the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB).

A Site Action Plan is a document used to guide the implementation of conservation activities at a particular site. It contains task assignments, milestones, timelines, resource allocations, data collection methodology, and evaluation criteria to be performed during the implementation process.



Site Action Plans are also potential tools for fundraising to conserve important sites.

Dunga Swamp

The site covers 500ha of papyrus swamp on the shore of Lake Victoria. A number of streams drain into the lake though the swamp, principally the Tako River. Adjacent to the swamp is Kisumu city, the third largest city in Kenya inhabited by nearly one million people. City developments and increasing, dense human population is exerting a lot of pressure on the wetland biota.

The wetland is an Important Bird Area (IBA) as it hosts a range of papyrus-endemic bird species, that is, birds found only in the papyrus swamp habitat. Among them are two globally threatened bird species, Papyrus Yellow Warbler and Papyrus Gonolek. The site is also an important fish breeding site and is home to the rare Sitatunga antelope *Tragelaphus spekei*.

The papyrus swamp that these birds rely on for survival has been shrinking at an alarming rate due to encroachment for agriculture, settlement and industries. The burning and unsustainable utilisation of papyrus plants was also identified as contributing to this loss.

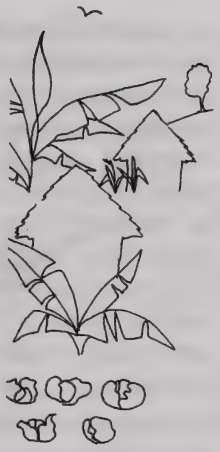
To address these main threats, Nature Kenya decided to develop a SAP for this site. This was done with constant consultations with stakeholders around the IBA, whose activities have both negative and positive impact on the wetland. The possible interventions that are highlighted in the SAP to curb the above threats are:

- Promotion of Eco-tourism, such as bird watching, sport-fishing, etc. for potential visitors
- Development of a Dunga forum to include all stakeholders
- Development of a sustainable papyrus industry with emphasis on quality rather than quantity crafts
- Environmental education
- Development of alternative forms of employment
- Utilisation of water hyacinth as an alternative to papyrus
- Clarifying and resolving land ownership issues and enforcing land protection laws
- Assessment of Dunga's role in dealing with local water pollution and siltation. If the swamp plays a significant role, it should be gazetted/protected/recognised as being an important element in Kisumu City Council's suite of environmental waste management and treatment works.

Mukurwei-ini River Valleys

The Mukurwe-ini Valleys IBA is located in Central Province, Nyeri District (0° 42'S, 36° 34' E), and covers an area of at least 20,000

ha. The area includes the catchments of the Thiha and Sagana Rivers on either side of Thangathi-Kanunga road near Mukurwe-ini town. It lies at an altitude of 1,500-1,600m.



This IBA is a stronghold of the Hinde's Babbler *Turdoides hindei,* one of Kenya's six endemic bird species and a globally threatened species. The Mukurwe-ini Valleys are a collection of people's farms, which are intensively cultivated. The Hinde's Babbler survives in the remaining patches of bush thicket, mainly along river valleys. As the human population increases and demand for land rises, even these thickets are now being cleared for farming. If the trend continues, we risk losing a significant part of the babbler population in the near future.

This Site Action Plan (SAP) identifies strategies to ensure the long-term survival of the Hinde's Babbler. It aims to do this by increasing the size and quality of the Hinde's Babbler habitat in Mukurwe-ini in addition to protecting the remaining habitat patches. An indicator of success will be an increase in the population of the Hinde's Babbler.

Proposed conservation actions for Mukurwe-ini Valleys are:

- Creation of a reserve or a network of reserves through land purchase
- Encouraging farmers to maintain bush thickets in their farms through land agreements
- Scientific research and monitoring of the species and its habitat
- Education and awareness creation and community involvement

By increasing the size and quality of the habitat, it is hoped that the population of the birds will start to increase. Through regular monitoring of the species and its habitat, we shall be able to gauge the effectiveness of the measures outlined above.

The two SAPs will be implemented over a period of five years. For effective implementation of these SAPs, different stakeholders were assigned some roles to play. The role of Nature Kenya, which took a lead in the SAP development, is to bring together all stakeholders operating at the two sites for the implementation.

For further details concerning the Site Action Plans, contact Nature Kenya.

Projects Funded by Critical Ecosystems Partnership Fund

Conservation International has identified biodiversity hotspots – areas rich in unique species not found elsewhere, and usually endangered – across the world. Focusing on such hotspots enables conservation efforts to have a significant impact from available funding.

A. Instituting sustainable biodiversity monitoring, management and conservation action in the Eastern Arc Mountains and Coastal Forests Hotspot

A. Osanya-Nyyneque

This project aims at monitoring biodiversity in Key Biodiversity Areas within the East African Coastal Forests and Eastern Arc Mountains, a region cutting across Kenya and Tanzania. Started in 2005, one of the key outputs is the Outcomes Biodiversity Database, managed by Nature Kenya assisted by Wildlife Conservation Society of Tanzania. The project is being co-implemented by BirdLife International and its Kenyan and Tanzanian partners.

By keeping track of biodiversity of global concern (especially globally threatened flora and fauna) and conservation activities in the associated sites, it is envisaged that the initiative will significantly contribute to guiding conservation investments, among other things, at regional and global level. The project has managed to bring together key stakeholders, forming a network of individuals and institutions who share and exchange information on conservation of this biodiversity-rich region.

B. Community Small Grants

This initiative enables the active involvement of the local people in conserving biodiversity, recognizing the important role they play in achieving conservation targets. Community Based Organisations (CBOs) within the Eastern Arc Mountains and Coastal Forests biodiversity hotspot are assisted to write proposals that can be executed within their capacities and meant to achieve conservation and poverty reduction objectives.

Nature Kenya, together with other partner institutions in conservation, namely the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the Coastal Forests Conservation Unit of National Museums of Kenya, coordinate and manage the whole process.The initiative is currently disbursing funds to CBOs in all seven Kenyan districts where Key Biodiversity Areas are found within the coastal region.

Alex Ngari

The Tropical Biology Association: laying the foundation for effective resource management in Africa

In Africa, limited capacity – in human capabilities, funding, etc - is a key challenge to effective conservation. Such seemingly insurmountable challenges can be tackled through institutional partnership. The Tropical Biology Association – Nature Kenya partnership is a case in point.

The TBA first came to Africa in 1994 and forged a partnership with the East Africa Natural History Society – the EANHS. Its mandate was to train biologists in the tropics in *field* ecology, conservation and research, and to catalyse links between biologists in the North and in the South. This approach was unique and partly provides the reason why the TBA has been so successful. The field aspect is important, allowing trainees to directly interact with nature as opposed to conventional class teaching. And they provide a rare opportunity to share experience and make contacts with individuals of different backgrounds. Any one TBA course is a blend of trainees from at least 15 nationalities.

With success, demand grew: in 2006, there were a record 405 applicants from 22 African countries for 46 places available each year. Competition is extremely high; the minimum requirement to attend a TBA course is a Bachelors degree plus basic biological research or work experience, or first year MSc level.

In response, by 1998 the TBA started running courses at Amani Nature Reserve, Tanzania, in addition to Kibale (Uganda) and Naivasha (Kenya). A year later, the courses ran in Taita, Kenya and in 2001, a new site – Kirindy forest, Madagascar – was found, increasing TBA annual courses to 4. Today, the TBA trains at least 92 biologists (half being Africans, and half Europeans, Americans and Asians) every year.

Of the 980 biologists trained so far, 480 biologists come from Africa. This represents invaluable input to institutional capacity.

New training initiatives

In 2004, the TBA set up a new programme of specialist skills training workshops, tailor-made to suit the needs of target groups. Initially, the focus is in delivering skills in writing for publication, fundraising, and communicating scientific results. Already three workshops have run in Nairobi (2004), Morogoro (2005) and Kampala (2006) in partnership

with National Museums of Kenya, Sokoine University of Agriculture and Makerere University.

The workshops are particularly good for staff who can only afford a short period away from their work. They are also suitable for scientists, researchers and conservation managers who hold positions of influence and who have the potential to apply and share their skills with others at their institutions afterwards. So far 61 individuals have attended the specialist skills workshops

The TBA is collaborating with the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (UK) on a 4-year research and training project on "combating invasive alien plants threatening the East Usambara Mountains, Tanzania". Funded by the Darwin Initiative, it involves Amani Nature Reserve and the Forestry and Beekeeping Division as its Tanzanian partners. In addition to quantifying the extent and impact of alien plant invasion at Amani Nature Reserve, the project will assist Tanzania to apply key principles for prevention, introduction and mitigation of impacts of invasive alien plants, contributing to the country's implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity. The project awarded scholarships to two Tanzanians to study for Masters of Science degrees at Sokoine University in 2005, and ran an introductory workshop on "survey and monitoring of invasive plants in tropical forest ecosystems" for 12 Tanzanian foresters and researchers in 2006.

The latest initiative at TBA is the launch of a **funding database** to assist African conservation biologists find scholarships, fund their research projects or finance training opportunities. The database is a web-based directory of over 185 sources of MSc or PhD scholarships, fellowships, internships, project funding, training opportunities, travel grants and volunteerships. To sign up, please visit the TBA website: www.tropical-biology.org/alumni/database/main.php

What lies ahead?

The TBA expertise remains in biological training. With a growing portfolio of programmes, it aspires to continue providing key practical training for conservation biologists and practitioners with the potential to have a significant impact on biodiversity management and research. Its success bears witness to a very fruitful partnership with Nature Kenya (the EANHS) and many other key institutional partners across Africa. TBA is open to new partnerships, although strengthening current partnerships is a top priority. A key challenge is to maintain the existing trademark of high levels of success.

Waterbird Monitoring Programme in Kenya Summary of July 2004-July 2006 Census Results

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The Waterbird census, an international monitoring strategy for wetlands biodiversity, was launched in Kenya in 1990. It is part of the International Waterfowl Census (IWC) and regional African Waterfowl Census (AfWC) in Africa, both co-ordinated by Wetlands International (WI). The AfWC in Kenya has been a collaborative effort among the Department of Ornithology of the National Museums of Kenya (NMK), Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), Wetland Biodiversity Monitoring Scheme (WBMS) and Nature Kenya. Waterbirds are counted in January and July each year in Ramsar sites and other wetlands in Kenya. This report is a summary of waterbird census done between July 2004 to July 2006.

In July 2004 five sites (L. Turkana (partially counted), L. Nakuru National Park, L. Bogoria, Nakuru Town Sewage and Njoro Sewage ponds) were counted by 74 volunteers. A total of 233,117 waterbirds of 65 species were recorded. The dominant species were Lesser Flamingo (160,830), Great White Pelican (51,537) and Pink-backed Pelican (4,751). Two interesting species: African Darter (4) and African Skimmer (1) were recorded in L. Turkana.

In July 2005, 40 volunteers were involved in the counts covering three sites (L. Nakuru N.P., Nakuru Town Sewage and Njoro Sewage ponds), and counted 635,194 waterbirds of 54 species. Lesser Flamingo (619,296) were more abundant in 2005 than in July 2004, while Great White Pelican (5361) were fewer.

A hundred volunteers counted water birds in six sites (L. Nakuru National Park, L. Bogoria, L. Baringo (partially counted), L. Naivasha, Nakuru Town Sewage and Nakuru Njoro Sewage) in July 2006. L. Naivasha and L. Baringo were counted in July for the first time since the counts were initiated in 1991. A total of 561,632 waterbirds of 71 species (in 19 bird families) were counted.

The most abundant species were: Lesser Flamingo (540,428) followed by Red-knobbed Coot (6,134) and then Great White Pelican (2,205). There was a slight decline in the number of flamingos counted in July 2006 from the counts of July 2005.

In July 2006 a number of dead flamingos were recorded in L. Bogoria (7) and L. Nakuru (1,245). Carcasses of the dead birds were examined by veterinary officers of the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) and tested negative for the Avian Influenza virus strain.

Some interesting species during the July 2006 count were: Great Crested Grebe (1 + 1) recorded in both L. Nakuru and L. Naivasha. Western Reef Heron (1) was recorded in L. Nakuru, while Giant Kingfisher (6), Lesser Black-backed Gull (4), African Darter (1), Little Bittern (2) and Black-crowned Night Heron (5) were recorded in L. Naivasha.

In January 2005, 38 sites were counted by 168 volunteers. A total of 462,437 waterbirds of 119 species were recorded. Lesser Flamingo (279,624), Great White Pelican (53,907) and Greater Flamingo (45,506) were the most abundant species. Interesting species recorded in January 2005 included: Four Great Crested Grebe on L. Naivasha, and Maccoa Duck recorded at 4 sites (L. Nakuru (2), L. Naivasha (1), L. Oloidien (16) and Manguo Floodplain). Fifteen African Skimmers and 18 skimmer nests were recorded at L. Turkana and one skimmer at Tana River Delta. White-backed Duck (1) was recorded at Nakuru Town Sewage and African Marsh Harrier recorded at L. Naivasha and Sabaki South Bank.

During the severe drought of January 2006, 34 sites were covered and a total of 1,605,876 individual waterbirds of 118 species were counted by 144 volunteers from across Kenya. The most abundant species were the 1,469,026 Flamingos: Lesser Flamingo (1,452,742) and Greater Flamingo (16,284). There was a significant increase in the number of waterbirds and flamingos counted in January 2006 (See Table on facing page).

Acknowledgments

The waterfowl counts of July 2004 to July 2006 were financially supported

Summary of Waterbird Numbers Counted in Kenya's Wetlands July 04-06

Summary Table	July Counts			January Counts	
	2004	2005	2006	2005	2006
1 Number of Volunteers	74	40	100	168	144
2 Sites Covered	5	3	6	38	34
3 Number of Species	65	54	71	119	118
4 Total Waterbirds	233,117	635,194	561,632	462,437	1,605,876
5 Number of Flamingos	161,990	624,450	541,578	323,037	1,469,026
6 Greater Flamingo	1,160	5,154	1,150	43,413	16,284
7 Lesser Flamingo	160,830	619,296	540,428	279,624	1,452,742

by the Wetlands Program of KWS, Bird Committee of Nature Kenya (NK), Darwin Initiative - Important Bird Areas monitoring project of Nature Kenya, World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Lake Bogoria Project and East African Wildlife Society (EAWLS) through the Kenya Wetland Forum. The count organisers are very grateful to the many volunteers: Members of A Rocha Kenya, Nature Kenya and Site Support Groups (Lake Victoria Sunset Birders, Friends of Kinangop Plateau, Arabuko-Sokoke Forest Guides Association, Friends of Lake Bogoria and Friends of Lake Nakuru) who contributed immensely to make the July 2004 to July 2006 waterbird counts such a big success. Magadi Soda Company, Thika Water and Sewerage Company, Nairobi Water and Sewerage Company, Kenyatta University, Kahawa Sukari Ranch, Hillcrest School and Delamere Estates gave permission to access their properties while Lake Naivasha Country Club, Colin Burch, Elsamere Field Study Centre, Fisheries Department, Fisherman's Camp, Loldia House and KWS provided boats and coxswains. We also cannot forget the enormous efforts in coordinating, logistical and actual counts assistance received from WWF Lake Bogoria Project, Lake Naivasha Riparian Association, Nature Kenya birdwatchers and KWS Wardens and Staff at Lake Nakuru National Park, Lake Bogoria Nature Reserve, Hell's Gate National Park and Nairobi National Park.

Further reading:

Wambugu, M., Musila, S., Muchane, M., Ndithia, H. and Wamiti, W. (2006) *Monitoring of waterbirds in Kenya, July 2005 and January 2006.* Research Reports of the Centre for Biodiversity, National Museums of Kenya: Ornithology, 67.

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Waterbird Monitoring Programme in Kenya: July 2003 and January 2004 Summary Results

Oliver Nasirwa, Muchai Muchane, Kariuki Ndang'ang'a,
Alfred Owino & Martin Mwema

Summarised from Research Reports of the Centre for Biodiversity,
National Museums of Kenya: Ornithology, 55 (2004) and Summary Report

In July 2003, 43 volunteers counted three sites: Lake Nakuru and the two neighbouring sewage works, Nakuru Town Sewage and Njoro Sewage Ponds. For the three sites combined, a total of 289,722 waterbirds of 58 species were counted. The most abundant species was as usual Lesser Flamingo (277,359) followed by Greater Flamingo (4,938) and White Pelican (1,377).

In January and February 2004, 47 sites were covered, a total of 478,786 individual waterbirds of 117 species were counted, and 160 volunteers from across Kenya were involved. The 47 sites were in the following regions: southern Rift Valley lakes, wetlands around Nairobi, sites around Lake Victoria and on the Kenya north coast (in the Malindi-Watamu area) and wetlands in Central Province.

The Rift Valley region had the highest number of waterbirds, recording 430,075 individuals of 92 waterbird species, followed by the Kenya north coast with 33,222 individuals of 79 waterbird species and third was wetlands around Nairobi with 7,669 individuals of 68 waterbird species.

The World Conservation Union (IUCN) provided an aircraft that enabled the simultaneous ground and aerial count of flamingos at Lake Magadi, as well as other large waterbirds (i.e. pelicans, herons, egrets, storks and ibises) in the Ewaso-Nyiro South marshes between Lake Magadi and Lake Natron from the air.

Flamingos accounted for about 97.4% and 76.4% of the total number of waterbirds counted in July 2003 and January 2004, respectively, in the Rift Valley lakes. At Lake Nakuru, the numbers of Lesser Flamingo showed a threefold decline from 739,177 in July 2002 to 277,236 in July 2003.

On the January counts, the numbers of Lesser Flamingo declined further, from 1,045,209 in 2003 to 226,265 in 2004. The numbers of Greater Flamingo showed a slight increase, from

4,050 in July 2002 to 4,933 in July 2003, and 1,779 in January 2003 to 2,160 in January 2004.

The total number of Lesser Flamingos counted in the Rift valley lakes combined – Nakuru, Bogoria, Elmenteita, Magadi, and Naivasha (including its small adjacent lakes: Oloidien and Sonachi) declined from 1,161,934 in January 2003 to 265,588 in January 2004. The numbers of Greater Flamingo increased from 4,850 in January 2003 to 14,018 in January 2004. In 2003, only one Lesser Flamingo was recorded outside the Rift Valley lakes – at Dandora Sewage Works. In January 2004, Lesser Flamingos were recorded at Lake Simbi in Nyanza (one bird) and the Sabaki River Mouth at the coast (262). Greater Flamingos were recorded at Semini's Dam on the Kinangop Plateau (three birds), and at the coast at Lake Chem Chem (79), Lake Jilore (90), Sabaki River Mouth (129) and Kensalt (1,046).

Only five African Darters were recorded in the entire January 2004 census – four at Lake Naivasha and one at Lake Oloidien.

Acknowledgements

The waterbird census programme in Kenya is a collaborative effort between the Department of Ornithology (National Museums of Kenya), Kenya Wildlife Service and Nature Kenya. The census is part of the International Waterbird Census (IWC).

The organisers are very grateful to all those who made the census a success. Some funding for the January 2004 census was provided by the UK's Darwin Initiative for the Survival of Species programme through the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, UK, as part of the project "*Monitoring Biodiversity for Site Management Planning in eastern African Wetlands*". Logistical support was provided by the Kenya Wildlife Service, World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), Lake Bogoria N.R. , Lake Nakuru N.P. and Nairobi N.P. The World Conservation Union (IUCN) provided an aircraft that enabled aerial counts to be carried out at Lake Magadi and the Ewaso-Nyiro South Marsh. A Rocha Kenya organised the counts at the Coast, and Turtle Bay Hotel assisted with transport for volunteers. The Wildlife Clubs of Kenya organised the counts around Lake Victoria, which received further support from Kenya Wildlife Service, City Council of Kisumu, Lake Victoria Sunset Birders, Kambo Fishing Group at Yala swamp and Dunga Community at Kisumu. Friends of Kinangop assisted in organising the counts at Kinangop. The Lake Naivasha Riparian Association supported the counts in various ways. In particular, Lake Naivasha Country Club, Colin Burch, Elsamere Field Study Centre, Fisherman's Camp and Loldia House assisted with boats. Brookside Dairy Limited, Kenyatta University, Nairobi City Council, Magadi Soda Company, Delamere Estates, Oserian Company, Kinja Nurseries, Dr. and Mrs Geoffrey Irvine, Mundui Estate, La Pieve-Kongoni Farm, Nderit Farm and Tony Church kindly permitted counters to cross their land to access wetland sites.

Urgent Actions required to save the globally threatened Aberdare Cisticola in the Mau Narok/Molo Grasslands IBA

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The Aberdare Cisticola is listed as globally endangered in the IUCN red data list. This small bird inhabits moist highland grassland above c.3,000m on both sides of the Rift Valley, at Molo, Mau Narok and the Aberdare mountains, in central Kenya. The species is threatened by rapid habitat loss and fragmentation due to expanding agriculture that continuously and substantially reduces its range.

In July 2006, we set out to survey the status of the Aberdare Cisticola in the Mau Narok/Molo grasslands. Results of the survey showed that good numbers of Aberdare Cisticolas exist in the remnant grasslands of the IBA. Three nests were also recorded in the Molo grasslands – 2 around Kenyatta Dam and 1 at Keresoi Dam. (The first nest record was noted in 2000 by George Eshiamwata and Silvester Karimi in the Aberdare central moorlands. See *Kenya Birds* volume 10 1&2.)

Edwin Selempo

One of the Molo grassland nests had two juveniles that had just hatched when we arrived at the site. However we were not able to monitor the nest to fledging since we had a short time at the study site. It seemed this was their breeding season, as the birds were encountered in pairs on several occasions. Some pairs were found with juveniles which we mist-netted and ringed successfully. The birds also made displays and called continuously and the air over the grasslands was filled with Aberdare Cisticola calls that we managed to record for future surveys.

The IBA is important for many species, as established by the abundance and diversity of grassland bird species recorded during this survey. This was exhibited by the common occurrence of the near-threatened Jackson's Widowbird, Sharpe's Longclaw and other grassland specialties, e.g. Wing-snapping Cisticola, Hunter's Cisticola, Levaillant's Cisticola, Red-capped Lark and Grassland Pipit. Among wetland species, the regionally threatened Great Crested Grebe (with its juveniles) and Maccoa Duck, among others, were also recorded at Kenyatta Dam in Molo.

There is therefore greater need than ever for advocating the conservation of this IBA. The Aberdare Cisticola occurred in grassland patches that were surrounded by cultivated land, and were isolated from other grasslands. This suggests concentration of the species in the few grassland remnants into which they are being pushed by the unfavourable land uses that now occupy large proportions of the IBA.

Clear differences in grassland cover and continuity between the parts of the IBA that fall within Mau Narok and Molo were apparent from this survey. These differences can be attributed to variation in human population density and land use practices between the two areas. From our observations, Molo was densely populated and mainly inhabited by the agriculturally-based Kikuyu and Kalenjin people whose livelihoods revolve around agriculture. Grasslands are, therefore, discontinuous and cover a lesser proportion of the land in these areas.

Mau Narok is less densely populated, and is occupied by the Maasai community, who practise pastoralism, and have a tendency of leaving extensive pasture for their livestock. This practice is, however, being broken by the influx of large-scale crop cultivation. Barley and wheat production is currently on the rise and poses a major threat, especially to the large grassland areas on the southern side of Mau Narok. Barley and wheat plantations are replacing large grass areas that used to be spared by the Maasai community for their livestock. The remaining grasslands are now heavily grazed since the pastoral community still keeps large herds of cattle.

Observations from this survey suggest that flat areas are often prioritised by farmers for cultivation. Grasslands have only been spared on areas that are sloping and shallow-soiled, especially along river/stream valleys and dam areas. Such areas are usually large since they may traverse through many farms.

There was evidence of grass burning. This is practised by farmers in order to improve grass quality for their livestock. Burning may be detrimental to the Aberdare Cisticola and other grassland specialists who depend on the grass tussocks for nesting. There is need to advise farmers on appropriate land use and management practices that would favour the existence of the grassland specialists in this IBA. A number of farms were fenced, signifying division of the land into smaller parcels; this could result into fragmentation, reducing grassland patch size. Small, isolated grassland patches cannot support Aberdare Cisticolas.

Molo had a higher proportion of grassland units than Mau Narok. Grasslands in Mau Narok, however, occur as large continuous patches, often broken by extensive monocultural crop plantations. The density of Aberdare Cisticola in Mau Narok was higher as a result of this difference in patch size. The issue of patch size should therefore be addressed.

The existence of large farm units in the Mau Narok/ Molo IBA has led to increased practice of large-scale farming. This has beneficial as well as detrimental effects on the conservation of grassland birds: when farmers opt to keep livestock, they retain extensive pastureland on their farms that serves the requirements of the birds. On the other hand, if farmers opt to produce crops instead, large continuous grassland areas are lost to cultivation, leading to loss and isolation of grasslands.

Mau Narok/ Molo IBA has now been identified by this survey as still containing some extensive areas of pristine grasslands. It is essential that immediate and realistic actions be taken that stem further loss of the grasslands, especially at crucial parts of the IBA. Specific farms have also been identified by this survey, e.g. Purko farm in Mau Narok, an association of land owners who have decided to put their farms together under a common management. This was considered the stronghold of the Aberdare Cisticola in this area during this survey. In Molo the grasslands surrounding Kenyatta Dam and Keresoi Dam were considered strongholds and crucial at least for this initial survey.

The IBA programme in Kenya needs to increase its efforts in monitoring, raising awareness and making contacts for formation of local Site Support Groups as crucial first steps. Our survey has identified areas that need more focus. This survey will continue for the next few months, with breaks in between, in order to collect baseline data for implementing some of those initiatives.

Aberdare Cisticola adult (right) and immature (below), and researchers in highland grassland.

Photos by Mercy Mwanika and Chege Kariuki

City birds: Rufous Sparrow (left), House Sparrow (right) and African Pied Wagtail (below). Photos by Peter Usher

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